

Common Formative Assessments: An Overview

by Larry Ainsworth

What Are Common Formative Assessments?

- Periodic or interim assessments collaboratively designed by grade-level or course teams of teachers
- Designed as matching *pre-* and *post-*assessments to ensure same-assessment to same-assessment comparison of student growth
- Similar in design and format to district and state assessments
- Items should represent essential (Power) standards *only*
- A *blend* of item types, including selected-response (multiple choice, true/false, matching) and constructed-response (short- or extended)
- Administered to all students in grade level or course several times during the quarter, semester, trimester, or entire school year
- Student results analyzed in Data Teams to guide instructional planning and delivery

What Are the Guidelines for Designing Common Formative Assessments?

1. Identify and vertically align Power Standards in content areas for each grade level and course, preK–12.
2. Determine important topics to assess with common formative assessment; locate the Power Standards that match those topics.
3. “Unwrap” the Power Standards for those topics to pinpoint concepts and skills students need to know and be able to do.
4. From those “unwrapped” Power Standards, determine Big Ideas that represent the integrated understanding students need to gain.
5. Collaboratively design common formative *pre-* and *post-*assessments—aligned to one another—that assess student understanding of the concepts, skills, and Big Ideas from the “unwrapped” Power Standards.
6. Include both selected-response and constructed-response items.
7. Review items to determine if student assessment results will provide *evidence of proficiency* regarding the Power Standards in focus; modify items as needed.

What Are the Benefits of Using Common Formative Assessments?

- *Regular and timely feedback* regarding student attainment of most critical standards, which allows teachers to modify instruction to better meet the diverse learning needs of all students
- *Multiple-measure assessments* that allow students to demonstrate their understanding in a *variety of formats*
- *Ongoing collaboration* opportunities for grade-level, course, and department teachers
- *Consistent expectations* within a grade level, course, and department regarding standards, instruction, and assessment priorities
- Agreed-upon *criteria for proficiency* to be met within each individual classroom, grade level, school, and district
- *Deliberate alignment* of classroom, school, district, and state assessments to better prepare students for success on state assessments
- Results that have *predictive value* as to how students are likely to do on each succeeding assessment, in time to make instructional modifications

Source: Larry Ainsworth & Donald Viegut, *Common Formative Assessments: How to Connect Standards-based Instruction and Assessment* (Corwin Press, 2006).